

FISHING AND FLOATING STREAMS IN THE CHARITON RIVER BASIN

Fish Species and Fishing Regulations

Fish species in streams of the Chariton River basin are those common to all of northern Missouri. The most commonly sought-after fish is undoubtedly the channel catfish. Flathead catfish are also popular. Other fish common to the basin and routinely caught by anglers include: drum, common carp, and gar. Walleye, spotted bass, and white crappie are less common but available in select locations.

Nothing could be more peaceful than floating or wading down a secluded stream, probing for a willing fish with pieces of worm, bits of liver or a frog. There is very little fishing pressure on any stream in the basin, so solitude is almost assured. The regulations chart below is specific to the streams in north Missouri, and should be helpful to all anglers.

The Chariton River

Because water level often is dependent upon releases from Lake Rathbun in Iowa, anyone planning an extended fishing trip will want to call Rathbun Dam for current water release information (641/647-2464 or http://www.nwk.usace.army.mil/rathbun/rathbun_home.htm and visit the Daily Lake Information section). It takes several days for the river in Missouri to change in response to changing releases at Rathbun, and one could be left with unexpected low or high flows. The river is navigable for its entire length in Missouri.

Fishing and floating on the Chariton River is best above Highway 136, where it has not been straightened. Deep water and woody cover is more common here. Channel catfish, flathead catfish, carp, drum, gar and the occasional walleye that has escaped from Lake Rathbun are caught here. Be prepared to drag a canoe or small jon boat over or around occasional piles of woody debris in the channel.

The river downstream of Highway 136 tends to be uniformly wide and shallow, without a lot of cover needed to hold fish. Relatively deep water may be found around bridge piers, piles of woody debris, or on the outside edge of a bend.

Mussel Fork

Though not immune from channelization, this stream has not been severely altered and has a good amount of woody cover, especially through the Mussel Fork Conservation Area. Spotted bass, stocked in the 1960's, are available but not abundant. Other species of fish common to the basin can also be found, but Mussel Fork is best known as a good stream for channel catfish.

Little Chariton

Though least impacted by channelization, the streams in this basin have been impacted by past coal mining operations and the impoundment of both Long Branch Lake (East Fork Little Chariton River) and Thomas Hill Reservoir (Middle Fork Little Chariton River). Fish common in other streams of the basin are also present here. The East Fork below Long Branch Lake occasionally yields nice catches of walleye which have escaped from the lake.

Tributary Streams

Smaller streams can be productive when fished “on the rise” at times when channel or flathead catfish are making migratory movements. Generally though, these streams are important to the basin fishery mostly as a fish nursery area.

STREAM FISHING REGULATIONS NORTH OF THE MISSOURI RIVER

FISH SPECIES	DAILY LIMIT	LENGTH LIMIT	FISHING SEASON
Channel and Blue Catfish (combined)	10	None	All Year
Flathead Catfish	5	None	All Year
Black Bass (largemouth, spotted, and smallmouth bass combined)	6	12"	All Year
White Bass and Hybrid Striped Bass (combined)	15	No more than 4 over 18"	All Year
Walleye and Sauger (combined)	4	15"	(See Below ^A)
White and Black Crappie (combined)	30	None	All Year
Paddlefish (Spoonbill)	2	24" ^B	3/15 to 4/30
All other fish combined	50 ^C	None	All Year
Bullfrogs and Green Frogs (combined)	8	None	Sunset 6/30 through 10/31

^A From February 20 through April 14, walleye and sauger on streams other than the Mississippi and Missouri rivers may be taken and possessed only between 6:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. CST.

^B Paddlefish length is measured from the eye to the fork of the tail.

^C Except daily limit is only 20 fish combined if taken by methods other than pole and line, trotline, throwline, limb line, or bank line.

POSSESSION LIMIT IS TWICE THE DAILY LIMIT. ONLY THE DAILY LIMIT MAY BE POSSESSED WHILE ON THE WATER OR STREAM BANKS. HEAD AND TAIL MUST REMAIN ATTACHED TO ALL FISH WITH LENGTH LIMITS WHILE ON THE WATER, OR UNTIL CHECKED BY A CONSERVATION AGENT.